



Confidant advised congressman during elections

By William E. Gibson, Washington Bureau

Pastor Scott Eynon prayed with Allen West when the Republican from Plantation ran his first race for Congress in 2008, and lost.

The two men prayed again for God's guidance on election night in 2010, when West drew national fame by winning a hotly contested seat in Broward and Palm Beach counties. And every night at 10 p.m., Eynon's mobile phone sounds an alarm to remind him to pray for Congressman West.

Eynon's role as spiritual adviser reached a pinnacle Wednesday, when he stood at a podium reserved for chaplains and presidents on the floor of the U.S. House to deliver the day's opening prayer.

The senior pastor of the Community Christian Church of Tamarac prayed for God's blessings for those who serve the nation, including members of Congress. "We also thank you for the problems that come up," he said. "They make us even more dependent upon you, for your guidance and for your strength."

Eynon is one of a few South Florida ministers and rabbis who over the years have delivered the House prayer — a time when faith and government intermingle. For West, it was especially significant because his pastor has been a close confidant during his stunning rise from political obscurity to conservative stardom.

The pastor, 50, got to know West six years ago when the church was near the congressman's home in Plantation. The church has since moved to Tamarac, where about 2,000 attend services each week and provide aid to poor children in South Florida, Haiti, Kenya and elsewhere.

Though not a political activist, Eynon has reinforced West's beliefs in individual freedom and limited government, his opposition to abortion and his warnings about "radical Islam." The pastor also encouraged West to run for the Senate next year, an option the congressman decided to reject.

They share a belief that freedom "should not be encumbered by unnecessary bureaucracy," the pastor said in an interview before the opening prayer. He cited a moral imperative to show compassion for the poor, but not always through government action.

"That primarily should be the role of the church," Eynon said. "Since the church has not fully realized its responsibility to do that, the government has just stepped in, and sometimes, in my opinion, has probably over-stepped."

"I believe that life beings at conception," he said, a view echoed by West.

"As far as radical Islam," Eynon said, "it is certainly a threat to our nation. Not to say that all within the Muslim community are a threat. Certainly not."

West has sparked charges of religious intolerance while warning that the nation should beware of a growing network of Islamic radicals.

"Around 622 A.D., something happened in Islam," West asserted Wednesday. "It went from being a strictly religious type of belief and became more of a theocratic political ideology. And it became quite violent. I think we have to talk about that, and understand.

"I think our ministers have to understand that they are on a battlefield," said West, a retired Army lieutenant colonel. "It's a battlefield of our spiritual strength."

As the nation prepared to mark the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, West hosted a Washington, D.C., screening of a conservative Christian group's film "Sacrificed Survivors: The Untold Story of the Ground Zero Mega Mosque."

Before the movie, the congressman said Islam has been violent since the days of Muhammad.

"We have to continue to challenge them," he said. "Because, once again, if we continue to give and give and cede and cede and give ground we're not going to be respected."

Guest chaplains regularly go to the House at the request of members. Rabbi Efrem Goldberg of the Boca Raton Synagogue was there in April at the request of U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch, D-Boca Raton.

"As a grandchild of immigrants who fled the Nazis and came to this country 72 years ago this month to find refuge, freedom, and opportunity, I join this House in a prayer of profound gratitude and deep appreciation for the blessings we, the people of the United States of America, are privileged to enjoy," Efrem said in his prayer.

While reflecting on his Capitol experience on Wednesday, Eynon said the message he will bring back to South Florida is that everyone, whether in the U.S. House or their own house, can influence others and act as an agent for change.

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/elections/fl-west-pastor-prayer-20111026,0,1283268.story>